

Being an effective Network Sponsor or Champion

Making the most of the role

(Sponsors and Champions of Employee Networks and Resource Groups)



2017 Edition

Thanks to KBR, K&L Gates, Sodexo and The City of London Corporation

Where to Start?

Many organisations have Employee Networks, typically made up of volunteers representing certain groups of staff. Most are trying to make a change to, or influence both culture and processes at their organisations.

For some senior staff, taking on the role of a Sponsor or Champion is a new challenge. The skills and approach needed to play this role may require a different approach to the 'leadership' styles honed for their day jobs.

This report is based on interviews with a number of Sponsors and D&I leaders and is aimed at helping Sponsors consider their roles and how they might be most effective. Critically, it also provides a perspective on how they can get the most from their roles as individuals, so that they also learn and develop from their interactions with the Network and Network Leaders.

The following were core elements that emerged as key for Network Sponsors, as highlighted by the participants:

Section 1 Support and challenge for Network Leaders and their Networks

Section 2 Navigating, influencing and holding the organisation to account

Section 3 Your leadership style and being a Sponsor

Section 4 Understanding impact and personal development

Section 5 Reflecting on your own learnings as a Network Sponsor more formally

We recognise that each Sponsor will face different challenges, so hope this can provide ideas for organisations and sponsors.

As well as insight, we have also created several tools, recommendations and templates to enable you to make the most of your Sponsor role. The following icons for these are used through the report:



INSIGHT



TOOLKIT



RECOMMENDATION

We hope you find these useful.

For this report, we have used Networks as shorthand for Employee Networks and Employee/Business Resource Groups (ERG/BRGs). Additionally, we have used Sponsor to mean both Sponsor and Champion of an Employee Network, or Employee/Business Resource Group (ERG/BRG). Recognising that some Networks have a number of people in leadership roles, we have mixed the use of Chair and Leaders.

A full list of thanks is included at the end of the report, but insights from K&L Gates, the City of London, Sodexo and KBR were all instrumental in making this report happen. If you are interested in discussing your sponsor role, your organisation's Network or ERG strategy, or how to make your Network more impactful, please do get in contact - hello@jeitoconsulting.com.

Thank you.
The Jeito Consulting team

“ You have to ask yourself the ‘So What’ question. What difference am I making by being a Sponsor and if the answer is ‘not much’, how can I change that ”

Susan Attard, Former Deputy Town Clerk, City of London. Now Strategy Director, Alzheimer's Society

What on earth...

Being a Network Sponsor

Some Network Sponsors put themselves forward for the role, others are approached by a Network. A few are 'volunteered' for the role.

However the appointment was made, whilst some have outline 'job specs' for the role, the majority of organisations didn't have a formal role specification. In all interviews though, a clear outline of what was expected came through.

Creating a Sponsor Role Spec

For those wanting an idea of what this varied role can cover, here are some of the most common responsibilities:

- Work with and coach/mentor the Chair and Network Leaders
- Champion activities – but recognise this must be more than just turning up at events
- Be interested in getting to know personally your Network Leaders and understand how you can develop your behaviours and ways of working so it becomes a two-way learning process
- Challenge the Network and the Network Chairs, whilst helping them understand where they can best make an impact or influence. Balance this with recognising that you may be part of the dominant culture, so might play down ideas that could make an impact
- Understand and lead the charge in influencing the business to see where the Networks can make a difference
- Coach the group to set direction and ensure the Network keeps focused and positive
- Recognise and celebrate success
- Consider the value to you of working with groups with whom you do not necessarily share traits

INSIGHT

Two organisations interviewed had Champions aligned to workstreams (such as Mental Health) and not to specific Networks.

The Networks then work within the workstream to support achieving their goals, alongside other interested Networks and company initiatives.

INSIGHT

Counter-intuitive Sponsor appointments.

Sponsors who worked with Networks where they were in a minority to the members, reported that:

- They gained personal experience of being in the minority
- They learned a huge amount about dealing with differences as a result
- Whilst this was not always the most comfortable, it did show commitment to learning and understanding the viewpoints of others

Of course, you may have specific responsibilities in mind for your Sponsors, but this is hopefully a good starting point to help your thinking.

So the question is, how can you make the most of it? What does the role mean for you, why are you doing it and what do you want to achieve?

By spending time initially answering these questions, you will be in a much stronger position to be more impactful in the role.

“Being a Sponsor helps you connect across the business and meet talent you never would in your everyday role”

David Zelinski, President, Onshore, Engineering & Construction – Americas, KBR

Section 1

Support and challenge for Network Leaders and the Networks

Every person interviewed commented that the Sponsor's role was about supporting and challenging the Networks and Network Chairs with whom they worked. But this varied depending on whether the Network was new, was going through a refresh or was established. Equally, the approach was different for New Chairs vs established ones.

Bear in mind that Networks exist for a number of reasons. These may evolve over time, but can include:

- Acting as a social group
- Acting as a support group
- Organising committee for events to drive visibility
- Community interaction
- Development of members
- Campaigning
- Employer brand and finding/connection with talent
- Changing culture within an organisation FIRST

So a key early question is: What is the Network trying to achieve/impact?

Whether a Network is newly formed or not, a common starting point when a Sponsor is initially appointed is to understand the aim of the Network.

For new Networks, a guided discussion with the Sponsor was often a first meeting. Probing to understand why they have decided to form and what they wish their initial objectives to be are critical first questions.

For more established Networks, as part of the Sponsor coaching role, the types of questions to ask include: What impact do they expect their Networks to have if they hit their objectives? What are their plans to achieve this? What might be barriers in place? How realistic are they? How can they get over these barriers themselves? How might you be able to help remove barriers?

Your Role: New Networks and New Network Chairs

As you work on your relationship with the Chair, you might want to consider exactly what role you should play. For most Sponsors, for new Networks, this often means being a little more directive and acting as a consultant to get things off the ground. As the Network evolves, however, this role moves to being a coach/mentor. In this case, it's primarily a role focused on asking the right questions for the Networks to achieve the right result, but without telling them exactly what to do.

When challenging, however, be aware that as a Sponsor, you may have ideas, but your role is to facilitate bringing ideas out of the Network and then help them to hone their plans to deliver in the right way. Unless they are really struggling to do this – in some cases, dependent on maturity of the Network – most Sponsors agreed that the Networks themselves should lead on idea generation.

“ I had to undertake a more direct approach initially to build confidence in Network Chairs and committee members, whether in planning and running meetings, as well as public speaking. Once underway, this has now moved into a more coaching relationship as they have gained confidence –which happened very quickly ”

Paul Double, Remembrancer, City of London Corporation



TOOLKIT: CULTURAL WEB

A way to focus on Cultural Change For many Networks, changing culture will be a key goal. The following is a useful model to help think through what they might be trying to change and the potential impact they are focused on achieving. It can also be used for department and team cultures, as well as organisations as a whole.

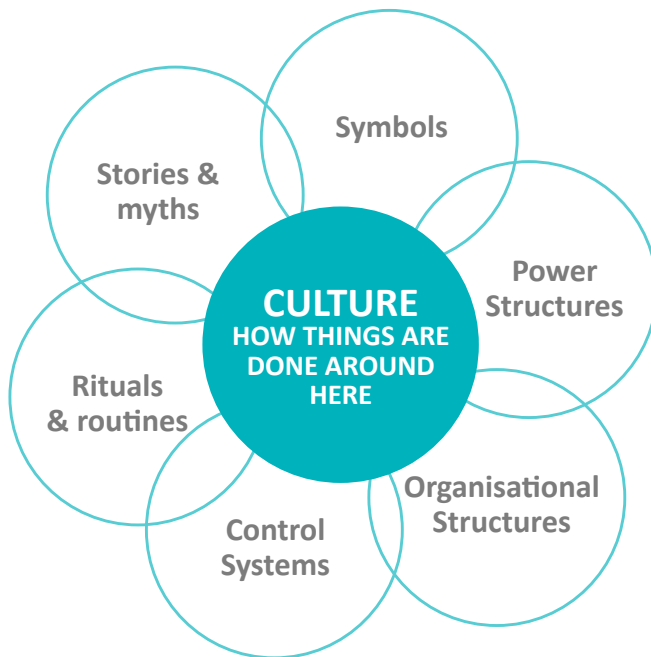


Figure 1: Cultural Web, Johnson and Scholes

Figure 1 shows the Cultural Web (Johnson and Scholes). As part of their research, these were the six areas of culture that they identified. Some descriptions are below, but for Networks, understanding what they'd like to influence vs what they are able to influence will be a key part of the challenge that Sponsors can offer.

The model consists of six factors: Stories (which get shared as folklore about working there), Symbols (including the physical environment you work in and your brand), Systems and Controls, your organisation and team Rituals and Routines, Organisational Structures and the actual Power Structures (meaning who really makes decisions).

One approach to making an impact on culture is to use this diagram to list everything that a Network might want to change; your role is to facilitate bringing ideas out of the Network and then help them to hone their plans to deliver in the right way. Unless they are really struggling to do this – in some cases, dependent on maturity of the Network – most Sponsors agreed that the Networks themselves should lead on idea generation.

‘Sometimes ERGs try to drive things that are not in their gift to change. This can cause frustration all round. Sponsors can be invaluable in helping networks to navigate the organisation to influence effectively’

Megan Horsburgh, Head of D&I,
Sodexo, UK & Ireland

‘I was amazed to see a member of my team excel as a chair of network, as she plays a very different role in my own team. The Sponsor role has given me great insight into the energy and dynamism created by the Networks and the unexpected roles people play to step up to deliver’

Caroline Al-Beyerty, Financial Services Director,
Chamberlain's Department, City of London Corporation

Section 2

Navigating, Influencing and holding the organisation to account

All Networks will require organisational support in order to be effective. For several Sponsors, a part of their role is to hold the organisation to account to ensure that any promises made by an organisation are followed up.

Organisations will ideally recognise that Networks need the ability to drive their own agendas and, in particular, to be allowed to fail on occasions as well as succeed. One example was a Network that was asked to play a role in changing culture, but was given no budget.

There was concern that the Network would not use the funding in the correct way. As one Sponsor commented: "People in their day-jobs are empowered to make decisions, even when that sometimes means they might make mistakes. We've all been there. You learn by making mistakes never to do that again, so we should allow our Networks to take responsibility for what they do as well."

“Most impactful for me has been the openness around hearing people’s stories - which gives you fresh insight in your colleagues”

Peter Kane, Chamberlain,
City of London Corporation

INSIGHT

Networks set up by passionate members were felt to be more impactful and had a higher chance of remaining active than those set up by the organisation

In particular, Sponsors can play a role in ensuring that:

- The Network understands who they need to influence to make things happen and use you, the Sponsor, as appropriate to influence/open doors
- Budgets and resources/support are in place and available where they have been committed to
- There is senior leadership buy-in and support and that Line Managers also understand the value that Networks play and the skills that Network Leaders can develop, which can also be used in their day job

As a Sponsor, you are a bridge between the Chair and the Leadership at your organisation and are someone who can also help navigate your organisational culture (Figure 2)



Figure 2: The Sponsor’s role as a bridge into the organisation



TOOLKIT: INFLUENCING - a critical challenge

As part of running a successful Network, the ability of Network Chairs to influence others was highlighted as an ongoing challenge.

As voluntary groups, to drive forward their activities, most Networks will need buy-in and engagement from a range of stakeholders. For many Network Chairs, however, their 'daytime' roles mean they may not have either seniority, or the experience in influencing.

For Sponsors, coaching Network Leaders in how to influence is a rewarding role. The following two step-approach should help.

Step 1: Work with your Network to define who they are trying to influence. Typically, this will fall into three groups: Those more senior than you that you are trying to influence (Influencing up, which may also include influencing you as a sponsor!), groups either internally or externally and the committee/Network Members themselves. Different approaches may be needed for each group, but each may also have a different outcome that defines successful influencing.

Step 2: Secondly, once these groups are defined, work to challenge the Network Leaders to think through what successful influencing looks like. You will know that many more senior individuals will have limited time in their diaries. So your own experience in making clear, succinct 'asks' will be helpful.

Figure 4 is a useful model to think through this, by: re-confirming your goals; thinking about who you need to influence and then considering what you want them to be thinking or doing as a result of you influencing them.

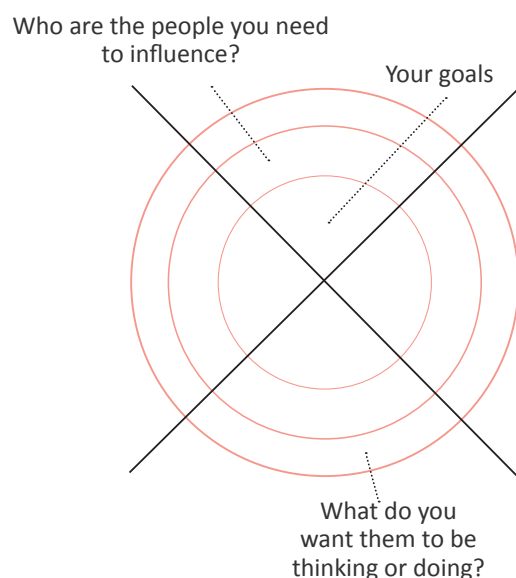


Figure 4: Planning to influence

Many Networks can also struggle to see things from the perspective of the organisation or group/individuals they are trying to influence. Coach them to think about what these perspectives might be and plan for them. Typical examples to raise include:

- Will your 'ask' be clear to the person you are trying to influence?
- Is the request you have within their power to make happen?
- What else might be on their agenda, which may influence their viewpoint?
- Who are the allies you have that may support your cause and help you to influence more effectively?
- Could you work together with other Networks to exert greater influence as a group?
- Where you are making budget or system change requests, what are the other factors that might exist to consider which may influence any decision?

The best way to influence will be different in each organisation and for what each Network is trying to achieve. But in your role as Sponsor, you are well positioned to hone Network Leaders' thinking to approach influencing in a well thought through way.

“You need to understand where your network is. And then what support they actually need from you as a Sponsor to get where they want to”

David Farnsworth, Chief Grants Officer, City of London Corporation

Section 3

Your leadership style and being a Sponsor



Most Sponsors will be well aware of their own leadership style and how they might adjust this when working with different team members and on different projects. The most recognised styles are: Authoritarian; Paternalistic; Democratic; Laissez-Faire; Transformational and Transactional.

The challenge, however, is adapting the right leadership style/approach for the Network and the individuals involved.

But being a Sponsor can require different leadership skills. You are a volunteer, working with volunteers, who are running a voluntary committee. And you are all trying to change/impact the culture at your organisation.

So it's tricky.

Additionally, Network Chairs will themselves have different leadership styles and ways of working. And as different Networks may also be in very different stages of development, they may need very different types of support.

As a Sponsor, you are trying to get the best from the Network, so your role needs to evolve from a consultant (who always has a solution) to a coach, who is there to help get the ideas out of the group by asking the right questions. Telling everyone what to do in a direct manner may not be the best approach.

TOOLKIT: SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP ADAPTED A new model for Sponsors

Situational Leadership is a model created by Dr Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. It is focused on how to adapt your leadership style for the situation you face with those with whom you are working.

Building on this concept, for this report, we have adapted the model to support Network Sponsors as they work with Network Chairs and their Networks. From Figure 3, the first stage is to assess where your Network is positioned. From D1 (Set-Up) to D4 (Motoring), each of these scenarios will have different requirements for support from you as a Sponsor.

Depending on the stage of the Network, you can then structure the support you might give. Support is focused around a balance between getting the Network/Network Chair onto the right track and how much your focus will be on 1-2-1 Network Chair development, rather than stepping back and supporting the Network as a whole.

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“You need to avoid being seen as ‘the most senior in the room’. You can’t be directional. My Leadership style has developed to be more facilitative – in my own day job, I’ve found myself stepping back more and allowing the discussion to take place for team members to reach their own conclusions”

Caroline Al-Beyerty, Financial Services Director, Chamberlain’s Department, City of London Corporation

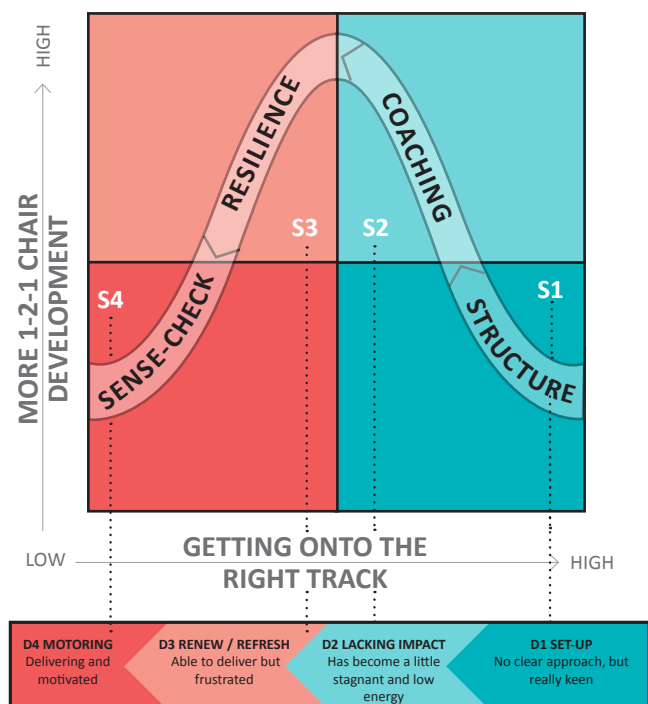


Figure 5: Network Sponsor Leadership Style - Adapted from Situational Leadership

For Networks just starting (D1), for example, the likelihood is that you may need to help them agree an initial STRUCTURE and come up with a framework for what they want to achieve and how they manage themselves. In this situation, it might be preferable to work with the whole Committee and members, rather than just the Chair (who may not be in place yet).

As the Network develops, over time, they can sometimes become stagnant, with little or no energy. Here, a more personal focus on helping the Chair navigate this situation to bring the energy back to the Network may be required. So, using COACHING skills with a Network Chair might be more successful than telling them what they need to do.

For experienced Network Chairs with larger ambitions for the Network, there can often be frustrations over time. This could be anything from feeling blocked by the organisation, to a sense that nothing is changing, to the Network taking up more and more time. Again, a more personal approach is needed to support that Network Chair and help them build RESILIENCE.

Finally, for Networks that are performing well, your role may revert to providing challenge, SENSE CHECKING and helping them to ensure they are measuring the progress they are making, as well as planning for the future.

Using the model: Use this tool as a Sponsor to assess how you might support your Network and Network Chair. For organisations, you will have different requirements from Sponsors for different Networks and different Network Leaders.

Try to keep in mind that as a Sponsor, you are part of the leadership, so be aware of your own potential biases and how these might impact the advice you give. Spending time working out how you want to approach your role can improve the impact you have.

Finally, a key element for many a Sponsor's role is to get to know the individuals in the Networks you are working with on a personal level. Don't be too shy about admitting what you do and don't know and also making sure that they understand you are there to learn as much as them. From the interviews for this survey, this shone through as a key aspect of getting the Sponsor/ Chair role to a very open and trust-based relationship.

Section 4

Understanding Impact and personal development for Network Leaders



RECOMMENDATION

Setting targets/reflecting

- Clearly divide the objectives of the Network itself vs the personal objectives for the Network Chair
- Encourage the Network to meet at least annually to assess impact and create clear plans for the year ahead
- Set goals that can be reflected upon/measured as clearly as possible
- As Network Chair, help to amplify any targets and then celebrate impact or successes
- Involve HR and line managers to recognise the effort, impact and skills developed

Sponsors were interested in the concept of developing Network Chairs/Leaders as part of their role, as well as supporting the Network more broadly to grow/develop.

When it comes to measurement, for Networks themselves, many measure data such as event attendance and Network membership. This is a great start, but if you are trying to influence behaviour and culture, what are the other things you might aim for?

The following recommendation and toolkit may give you some ideas.



TOOLKIT: Starter assessment questions

The list below might give some pointers as to how these targets might be outlined over any 12 month period.

As well as Network goals, also consider what the Network Leaders might be wishing to gain from their time on the Committee. From the

interviews, many companies do not consider this as part of the development process – and yet a huge amount regarding personal skills and leadership can be learned from taking on a Network Leader role, which should be recognised.

For the Network	For the Network Chair/Leaders
What is the Network's Mission/What are you trying to achieve?	What do you want to get out of being a Network Leader?
What will the Network's key goals be for the next 12 months?	If we were to sit down after 12 months, what skills would you like to have developed?
How will these goals be measured and who will be responsible for helping to achieve them?	How might the skills you develop as a Network Leader be used in your day job? And vice-versa?
What sources of data or metrics might you have available that you can use?	If you look ahead 12-24 months, how would you like to be developing those around you as future leaders of the Network?

Figure 6: Starter questions for Networks and Network Chairs/Leaders

Section 5

Reflecting on your own learnings as a Network Sponsor

All of those interviewed were interested in the concept of developing Network Chairs/ Leaders as part of their role, as well as supporting the Network more broadly to grow/develop. However, very few had sessions with their Network to assess impact over the course of the year.

Additionally, none of the respondents had formal sessions as Sponsors to consider their own learnings or personal development. Recommendations: Sponsor skills, learning and development

- Having an initial meeting (both 1-2-1 with the Network Sponsor and their line manager, and also between Sponsors) is a useful opportunity to discuss their roles to be transparent about how they might support the Networks
- Time with Sponsors, Network Chairs and the HR team once or twice a year would be useful to reflect upon and assess the impact they are having, their own development/learnings and where they, as a group, might make more of an impact going forward. This also provides new Sponsors and Chairs with a forum to engage and collaborate
- Keeping a record of personal reflections on learnings, insight and behaviours that you have changed is a powerful way to assess your own 'journey'. These can also be used as case studies to support communications throughout a business, where Sponsors are happy to share their experiences
- Sponsors also recognised the importance of feeding in formally to Network Chair Line Managers around their impact and personal development, as well as including the Sponsor role in their own appraisal



RECOMMENDATION

Succession planning for Sponsors and Network Leaders

Every Network and Network Chair will have periods where they run out of steam. A key role of a Sponsor is to help keep Network leaders energised, but also to recognise that a funnel of potential future leaders should always be on the agenda. For Network Chairs, you might want to help them recognise that part of their own leadership journey is helping other leaders of the future to develop and potentially take over at the right time.

Equally, not all Network Sponsors stay in role forever. Based on your organisation, you will have been appointed in different ways. If you are thinking of stepping out of the role, where you can, help think through with the Network who might be a good replacement. This may help smooth any handover.

“ We are Co-Chairs of the London office D&I Committee, not formally Sponsors of the Networks. As such, we focus on broader Diversity campaigns to communicate across the business, such as mental health and intergenerational understanding, and the Networks both support us to drive these and to manage their own activities ”

Jonathan Lawrence, Christine Braamskamp
- Co-Chairs, K&L Gates London Diversity & Inclusion Committee

“ Having the Network involved in a key client-facing event has been a fantastic way to give them profile and recognition ”

Graham Hill, Executive Vice-President, Global Business Development & Strategy, KBR

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Final thoughts

TOOLKIT

Sponsor Checklist



As a short re-cap, these may be useful questions to ask yourself as a Network Sponsor:

- Am I clear what the mission of my Network is – i.e. what it wants to achieve?
- What role can I play to support the Network Chair and Leaders?
- How can I make use of my time with the Network to really get to know the leaders personally and learn about them, and they me?
- What might this role tell me about my own leadership style?
- How can I amplify the impact of the Network?
- What would sensible metrics be for the Network (and for my role)?
- How do I want to reflect back and keep a record of my learnings and any behavioural change as a result?
- As I look ahead, what needs to happen for succession in the Network and with my role? When should this process begin to ensure a smooth handover?

Thanks

We want to thank the following for taking part or supporting this research :

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And to Mel Tremain for organising all of the interviews

Jeito Consulting

Jeito is Brazilian Portuguese slang for 'getting things done'. We are a consultancy harnessing the experience of our team and associates to help clients with:

- Culture, Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion
- Providing strategic support and experts to play a role in-house to grow business for future investment
- Small firms and sole traders to find the right support providers to get critical things done



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